Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED

18-15

OFF-DUTY FIREARMS MISHAPS

"Don't try this at home, I'm a trained professional!" (Part 2 - USN Edition)

We recently published a USMC version of this lesson, but the stats and reports tell us we need to talk about the Navy side of our family as well. In the past 36 months now, just like the Marines, our Navy warfighters have negligently shot themselves far more OFF duty than on duty! For the Navy it is 300 percent more! We have had 39 inadvertent firearm discharges in off-duty mishaps, resulting in 647 lost workdays, 1,614 days of LIMDU, and one fatality. To re-phrase an old Naval quote, *"We have met the enemy, and he is US!"*

Somehow our discipline on the range and on duty isn't carrying home. Here is a random sampling of some of the most recent events from just the Navy side of our Blue/Green family:

A Sailor was in his apartment cleaning his personal fire arm. He did not check the chamber. During the cleaning process "he could not tell if the spring had released so he compressed the trigger while aiming at the interior side of his left leg." You can imagine the rest.

A Sailor was cleaning a 9mm handgun at home. He completed cleaning the handgun and placed a loaded magazine into the weapon. Later, his friend came over to visit. Our Sailor picked up the loaded firearm intending to demonstrate to his buddy how to remove the slide. He "forgot the firearm was loaded." The slide unexpectedly racked forward, discharging a round into both of his friend's legs and the arm of the couch.

A Sailor was at his friend's house instructing her how to clean a handgun. After cleaning the weapon, his friend inserted a magazine she "thought was not loaded." When she depressed the slide locking mechanism, the slide went forward, startling her. In her surprise, she accidentally pressed the trigger, and the firearm discharged, shooting the Sailor.

After returning home from the shooting range, a Sailor was breaking down his gun to clean it. He pulled the trigger as part of the breakdown sequence, discharging a round he "did not know was in the chamber." He shot himself in the hand.

If you treat every gun like it is loaded, 'not knowing' or 'forgetting' doesn't hurt as much…because you always "know" it is loaded.

As a Sailor was exiting the front passenger seat of a car, he picked up his handgun from the floor. While picking up the gun, it discharged, sending a round through his finger and continuing through both legs of the driver. – *It doesn't say how it went off, but muzzle discipline would've kept them both out of the hospital.*

A Sailor was packing his car from a hotel room. He placed his handgun and holster in his waist band. The gun was not set in the holster correctly and, as he was walking to his vehicle, the gun slipped down his leg. He grabbed the pistol to catch it, accidentally hit the trigger, and shot himself in the leg. The report says, "once he realized he was shot," he drove himself to the closest hospital. – *I wonder how long it took him to 'realize he was shot'. He deserves points for toughness, but not for dexterity. It really is ok to let the EMTs drive you when you are wounded and bleeding. Tough guys can call 911 too.*

(UNCLAS/FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY) THE INFORMATION IN NAVSAFECEN LESSONS LEARNED PRODUCTS IS DERIVED FROM MISHAP REPORTS AND HAZARD REPORTS. LESSONS LEARNED PRODUCTS ARE PROVIDED TO ASSIST IN TRAINING AND MISHAP PREVENTION.

A Sailor was attending a barbeque and, evidently, was carrying. He felt a need to adjust his belt [drum roll…]. As he did so, his right index finger caught the trigger of his handgun, discharging a round into his right leg.

A Sailor was at home loading his personal handgun. The slide was locked back and the magazine was removed. He placed one round in the chamber and released the slide to chamber the round. When the slide went forward, the gun discharged. The report states "SVM was not aware of it, but his left hand was in front of the gun." – *Need we say more?*

Lessons Learned

This part may sound familiar if you read the USMC version of this lesson. These are not new lessons. They are the same lessons we've learned repeatedly since the invention of firearms. All of these incidents result from failing to follow the basic tenets of firearm safety. Generally, there are four main firearm safety rules, but we'll just focus on the top two to keep it simple:

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
This includes:
-A weapon you just loaded
-A weapon you just un-loaded
-A weapon you are picking up off the floor of your car
-A weapon your buddy just handed you…or you just handed back to your buddy
-A weapon in your waistband holster
-Even a weapon you just dismantled into 4 pieces and is sitting on the table!

2. Never point a loaded weapon (see #1) at anything you don't intend to shoot.
This doesn't just mean "purposefully aiming" – it means **Muzzle Discipline**. Don't ever let the muzzle cover anything you aren't willing to shoot, including:
-Any body parts you want to keep attached
-Your friend's foot, leg, hand, etc.
-The thin wall of the room, on the other side of which you can't see who is there (it has happened…)
-etc.

Following just these two basic rules would have avoided 98% of the Navy off-duty firearm mishaps in the past 3 years!

Recommendations

1. Brief this lesson to all USN personnel (and Marines too…)
2. Remember AND USE these two basic firearm safety rules, even OFF duty.
3. Many folks enjoy consuming alcohol and also enjoy firearms, BUT please don't mix the two.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"

(UNCLAS/FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY) THE INFORMATION IN NAVSAFECEN LESSONS LEARNED PRODUCTS IS DERIVED FROM MISHAP REPORTS AND HAZARD REPORTS. LESSONS LEARNED PRODUCTS ARE PROVIDED TO ASSIST IN TRAINING AND MISHAP PREVENTION.